

A Motion For:

GRADUAL ABOLITION OF
SLAVERY:

1823

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SKETCHES

OF

SOME OF THE SPEECHES

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

ON THE 15TH MAY, 1823,

ON

A MOTION FOR THE MITIGATION

AND

GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

THROUGHOUT THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

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SKETCHES

OF

SOME OF THE SPEECHES

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, &c.

MR. FOWELL BUXTON addressed the House nearly as follows :—

Before I enter on the important, and, as some gentlemen deem it, the very perilous question of which I have given notice, I feel myself called upon to advert to the advice which I have received, and to the warnings with which I have been favoured, of dreadful evils likely to be produced in the West Indies by the agitation of this subject. It is no slight matter, I have been told—and I admit it—to agitate the question at all. It is no slight matter to excite apprehensions, even the most groundless, in the minds of persons so respectable as those who signed the petition which has just been presented by the honourable member for Taunton. I can truly say, that I feel no degree of animosity, I harbour no species of prejudice, either against the whole body, or against any individual of the body of persons connected with the West Indies. I consider them as eminently unfortunate, particularly the hereditary proprietors, in this, that their predecessors were tempted to embark their property in a species of investment which, at that time, was considered to be moral and consistent with justice; but which, when the subject has been thoroughly sifted, is found to be irreconcilable with the principles of justice and humanity. With these feelings towards the West Indians, deeming them rather unfortunate than culpable, I do consider it no

slight matter to introduce any motion painful to their feelings.

It is no slight matter to drag into public view before this nation, and before surrounding nations, jealous of the reputation of this country, the worst, perhaps the only capital stain, on British policy ; at a moment, too, when we have felt so keenly, and expressed ourselves so warmly, and all but incurred the hazards of war for the sake of a nation threatened with political servitude : it is, I say, no slight matter to divulge the fact, that, of British subjects, there are one million living in personal slavery ;—not Spaniards, but our own fellow-subjects ; *not threatened with, but enduring, not political interference, but personal slavery*,—"personal slavery, in comparison of which," said Mr. Fox, "political slavery, much as I hate it, is a bare metaphor."

I have heard much privately—and the House has heard somewhat publicly—of the responsibility which I incur by the agitation of this question. And I admit, that a man ought to be pretty sure that his cause is good, as I am ; and not only that the cause is good, but that the time is discreetly chosen, as I am ; and that he is free from all personal considerations and prejudices, as I am ; before he ventures to reject such advice, and to incur such responsibility. Why, then, do I incur that responsibility ? First, because I am quite sure, that the dangers, if not absolutely groundless, if not utterly imaginary, as I believe they are, have been much over-rated : and, secondly, because I am sure, that it is impossible to over-rate the real and substantial blessings that will accrue to a million of men, by the agitation of this subject in this house. I have not a notion that slavery can endure investigation. It must perish, when once brought under the public eye. And I feel confident that a few minutes ago, we commenced that process which will conclude, though not speedily, in the extinction of slavery throughout the whole of the British dominions.

The good, then, to be obtained is incalculable. Now let us consider, for a moment, the price we are to pay for it. We have heard a good deal of late of the danger of insurrection in the West Indies. If this were the

first time that slavery had ever been mentioned in this house ; if I were the first rash man who had ever ventured to commiserate the condition of the negroes, perhaps there might be something alarming in the allegations of danger. But, it does so happen, that this same subject of slavery, and that infinitely more delicate subject of emancipation from slavery, to name which in this house, said the honourable member for Taunton, is to shed blood in the West Indies, have been debated again and again and again within these walls.

It is at least a singular fact, that no motion was ever made in this house, on the subject of negro slavery, which has not been met with just the same predictions. No matter what the motion was ; it was always attended with the same predictions in almost the same language.

In the year 1787, a very feeble attempt was made to abate the horrors of the Middle Passage—to admit a little more air into the suffocating and pestilent holds of the slave-ships. The alarm was instantly taken. The cry of the West Indians, as we have heard it to night, was the cry of that day. An insurrection of all the blacks—the massacre of all the whites—was to be the inevitable consequence. In the House of Lords, a man of no mean consideration in point of rank, the Duke of Chandos, besought their lordships not to meddle with this alarming question. He might, he said, pretend to know a little more of the subject than their lordships—that his pockets were filled with letters from his correspondents in the West Indies, who declared, that the English newspapers were read by the negroes as regularly as the ships brought them ; and that, so soon as they had come to the paragraph announcing that their lordships had thought it fit to lessen the sufferings of the Middle Passage, they would burst out into open rebellion ! The bill passed, however ; and, somehow or other, the prediction was not verified. About the same year, my honourable friend commenced that career with which his name will always be coupled ; and which he brought to a glorious termination twenty years afterwards. Let any gentleman look to the proceedings in any one of those twenty years, and he will find three

things :—First, an effort made by my honourable friend on behalf of the negro : next, on the part of the West Indians, a prediction of insurrection amongst the blacks : and, thirdly, that prediction contradicted by the events of the year. Not only was each separate prophecy falsified by the fact ; but, it is really remarkable to observe, if you place the whole train of prophecy on the one side, and the whole train of events on the other, how fully the latter refutes and overturns the former. Those twenty years, which, if the West Indians are true prophets, ought to have been marked with perpetual violence, bloodshed, and desolation, were, in point of fact, remarkable for a degree of tranquillity in the British West Indies, unexampled in any other period of their history.

Again : at that time, this country was so greedy of the gains of slave-trading, that she not only supplied her own colonies with slaves, but became the carrier of other nations. My honourable friend, with his usual vigilance, discovered this ; and introduced a bill to stop the practice. The cry of danger was revived. “ If you stop that trade,” said, in this house, the agent of one of the West India Islands, “ you will occasion an insurrection of all the blacks. You will cause the murder of all the whites.” But this—perhaps the fiftieth prediction of the same kind—was utterly falsified by the fact. Our negroes actually did not rebel, because we ceased to supply rival colonies with slaves.

Precisely parallel to this is the argument against me. I do interfere, it is true. I shall offer suggestions, tending to improve the condition of the negroes. But, I should be glad to know which of these is likely to produce agitation and discontent amongst them. One of our first propositions is, That the slave shall have Sunday for rest and religious instruction ; and that another day in the week shall be allowed him for the cultivation of his provision ground. Is there anything irritating in this ?—Next we say, that all negro children, born after a certain day, ought to be free—free from their birth—never subjected to be bought and sold, and whipped, and brutalized. Surely, such a provision will be far from producing discontent ! I am informed, on

what I consider the best authority—that of a person intimately acquainted with the feelings of the negro population,—that he knows of no bond, so likely to secure their fidelity, as benefits conferred on their children—the advantages of education—and freedom.—Next, we propose to get rid of the cart-whip. Will the negro be offended at that? Is he so fondly attached to the cart-whip, that, in order to secure the continuance of its use, he will rise in rebellion? In point of fact, all we propose to do is this—to ameliorate the condition of the negro—to give him something like the protection of British law—to reduce, not so much the power, as the possible abuse of power, in the master—and, above all, to rescue his children from that terrible condition, of which he well knows the bitterness. And what is there in all this, calculated to rouse the furious passions of the negro? On the contrary, I am fully persuaded, that security is to be found—and is only to be found—in justice towards that oppressed people. If we wish to preserve the West Indies—if we wish to avoid a dreadful convulsion—it must be by restoring to the injured race, those rights which we have too long withheld.

Ought we then to grind down the negro, until almost any change will be for the better—or shall we upraise him in the scale of being, till almost any change will be for the worse? Mr. Pitt declared, that “it was impossible to increase the happiness, or enlarge the freedom, of the negro, without, in an equal degree, adding to the security of the colonies, and of all their inhabitants.”

I do not mean to say, that there are not very great perils connected with the present state of the West Indies. On the contrary, I am quite sure—as sure as it is possible for any man in the house or in the country to be—that there is imminent peril at the present moment; and that that peril will increase, unless our system be altered. For I know, wherever there is oppression, there is danger—wherever there is slavery, there must be great danger—danger, in proportion to the degree of suffering. But the question is, how that danger can be avoided. I answer, that it is to be avoided by that spirit of humanity which has avoided it in other

places—by doing justice to those whom we now oppress—by giving liberty for slavery, happiness for misery. But even supposing the danger of giving to be as great as the danger of withholding ; there may be danger in moving, and danger in standing still—danger in proceeding, and danger in doing nothing : then, I ask the house—and ask it seriously—whether it be not better for us to incur peril for justice and humanity, for freedom, and for the sake of giving happiness to millions hitherto oppressed ; or, whether it be better to incur peril for slavery, cruelty, and injustice—for the sake of destroying the happiness of those wretched beings, upon whom we have already showered every species of calamity ?

I now come to tell gentlemen the course we mean to pursue ; and I hope I shall not be deemed imprudent, if I throw off all disguise, and state frankly, and without reserve, the object at which we aim. The object at which we aim, is the extinction of slavery—nothing less than the extinction of slavery—in nothing less than the whole of the British dominions :—not, however, the rapid termination of that state—not the sudden emancipation of the negro—but such preparatory steps, such measures of precaution, as, by slow degrees, and in a course of years, first fitting and qualifying the slave for the enjoyment of freedom, shall gently conduct us to the annihilation of slavery. Nothing can more clearly show that we mean nothing rash, nothing rapid, nothing abrupt, nothing bearing any feature of violence, than this—that if I succeed, to the fullest extent of my desires, confessedly sanguine, no man will be able to say, even I shall be unable to predict, that at such a time, or in such a year, slavery will be abolished. In point of fact, it will never be abolished : it will never be destroyed. It will subside ; it will decline ; it will expire ; it will, as it were, burn itself down into its socket, and go out. We are far from meaning to attempt to cut down slavery, in the full maturity of its vigour. We rather shall leave it gently to decay—slowly, silently, almost imperceptibly, to die away, and to be forgotten.

Now, see the operation of our principle. We say—No more slaves shall be made ; no more children shall

be enslaved. At present, we have in our colonies, a certain body of slaves. This will be reduced, (to use a military phrase,) by all casualties; but it will not be replenished and reinforced by any new recruits. At present, the number is about a million. Next year, that number will be somewhat abated. In ten years' time, it will be visibly diminished. In twenty or thirty years' time, all the young, the vigorous, and those rising into life, will be free; and the slaves will be those who have passed the meridian of their days—who are declining into age—the aged and the decrepid. Every year, then, will make a considerable change; every child born will increase the one body—every slave dying will reduce the other. A few years further, and you will find, only here and there, scattered over the face of the country, a remnant of slavery. A very few years further, he too will have followed his brethren, and slavery will be no more.

Now observe. This is not speculation. It is not a theory, which has never been tried: it is not one of the “new lights,” to use the expression of the honourable member for Taunton: but it has taken place, and in a country too with which that honourable member is very familiar. It may, perhaps, nevertheless, be unknown to part of the house, that just in this way slavery has gone out and expired in New York. Thirty years ago, New York was what is called a slave state; that is, a proportion of its labourers were slaves; and it was liable to those evils which slavery never fails to generate. The principle which I now advocate was applied; and—without rebellion, without convulsion; without a single riot, without any thing that deserves the name of inconvenience—Slavery has gone out in the State of New York. The same thing has been done in Pennsylvania, and several other of the United States. If any man asks me, with what effect this has been done; I answer, that there is not a person connected with that part of the world, who will not acknowledge, that much as it has contributed to the happiness of the blacks, it has in no less degree promoted the happiness, the moral improvement, and even the pecuniary prosperity of the whites. The fact is, every

American from that part of the country is ready to acknowledge, that the worst of all curses has fled away, and left them. Here, then, the principle which I now recommend has begun and concluded its operation.

There are other parts of the world, where the same principle is now in action, where slavery is gradually and quietly working itself out. And now, sir, I am going to take a great liberty—just to put a question to each gentleman in the house. Does he know in what part of the British dominions this very principle is in action? The point in dispute, be it observed, is this. I say, that our principle operates without noise and tumult. My opponents say, that it will be attended with violence and convulsion. Then, I put it to my opponent, if he know where this noisy, turbulent, convulsive, principle is at work? If he do not know, my point is proved—its quiet, peaceable, silent nature is proved.

It is in full operation, at this moment, in Ceylon; and has been so, since 1816. The activity of the governor, General Brownrigg, and of Sir Alexander Johnstone, there introduced it; and, as yet, it has produced no ill effect of any kind. The same thing occurred at Bencoolen, under the administration of Sir Stamford Raffles. The same at Saint Helena. Now, this last does tell positively in my favour. Public curiosity has recently been excited, in an extraordinary degree. Books, enough to fill a library, have been written, detailing the administration of Sir Hudson Lowe. Acts the most slight—anecdotes the most trivial—expressions the most unmeaning, have been recorded with exact fidelity. Generations yet unborn shall know, that on such a day in July, Sir Hudson Lowe pronounced that the weather was warm; and that on such a day of the following December, Bonaparte uttered a conjecture that it would rain in the course of the week. Nothing has escaped the researches of the historian—nothing has been overlooked by the hungry curiosity of the public—nothing—Yes! one thing has never been noticed; namely, that Sir Hudson Lowe gave the death-blow to slavery at Saint Helena.

The same principle, only upon a much larger scale,

has been operating in South America. By a fundamental law of Columbia, every child born after the day when the constitution was proclaimed, is, *ipso facto*, free. They did that at which I am now aiming; and they did more. They liberated the children, but they also took measures for emancipating the parent. They levied a legacy duty, varying from three to ten per cent. upon all disposable personal property: they set apart this fund for a special object: and they declared, that no power should exist in the state to alter the destination of a single shilling. The purchase to which that tax is devoted, is the purchase of negroes from personal slavery, and it is to continue till no slave remains in Columbia. If ever there was an opportunity of trying, whether the principle was productive of peace or of convulsion, that opportunity was now afforded. Columbia was overrun by hostile armies. The masters were often obliged to abandon their property. The black population amounted to nine hundred thousand persons. An honourable friend of mine, on a former occasion, contended, that the numbers were inconsiderable. He was mistaken. I have in my hand a letter from Mr. Ravenga, in which he states, that in a population of three millions, the number of blacks and Indians is nine hundred thousand. Now, of these a large number were suddenly emancipated., Bolivar gave liberty to seven hundred. Others acted in the same way. The law to which I have alluded, which liberates all the children, is rapidly liberating the adults. What has been the effect? Where the opportunities of insurrection have been so frequent and so tempting, what has been the effect? Mr. Ravenga authorises me to say, that the effect has been, a degree of docility on the part of the blacks, a degree of confidence and security on the part of the whites, unknown in any preceding period of the history of Columbia.

Now for the application of this principle. What we contend for is this, that we should cut off the supply; that we should intercept the fountain by which slavery is fed; that all negro children, born after a certain day, should be free. I have already shown the safety and practicability of acting upon this principle. Will any

man deny its propriety and justice? A negro child is born to-day. What right on earth have we to say, that that child shall be a slave? I want to know by what authority we act, under what warrant we proceed, when we say, that that child shall eat the bitter bread, and do the bitter labour of a bondsman, all the days of his life? I know the answer that will be given me: "The father is mine; the mother is mine; and therefore the child is mine." That is, you have made his parents eat the bitter bread, and do the bitter labour of slaves; and this crime, which you have committed against his parents, is to be your apology for the crime which you design to commit against him.

But, Sir, I hope that every man in this house, nay, that every man and woman in Great Britain, will seriously weigh this question. By what principle of justice, by what tenet of religion do we act, when we say to the planter, "There! a black child is born to-day: take him: do what you like with him: make him a brute, if it so please you; a brute in his labour, a brute in ignorance: feed him like a brute, flog him like a brute!" I say, how are we authorised, on a child that has done no wrong, to pronounce this sentence, to inflict this curse?

It is a crime to go to Africa, and steal a man, and make him a slave. For two centuries this was no crime at all. It was most just and innocent commerce. My honourable friend, (Mr. Wilberforce,) instituted an inquiry into this innocent traffic, and it turned out to be a most intolerable enormity. It is a crime, then, by the laws of England, to make the full-grown African a slave. And, how is it less a crime, to make a new-born Creole a slave? I say, it is as great—it is even a greater crime. The African has at least passed a considerable portion of his life in freedom: for twenty or thirty years, he has tasted the innumerable enjoyments which liberty confers. But the child who is made a slave from his birth, knows nothing but servitude and misery.—Then as to guilt. Formerly we divided it with another party. The black factor made the man a slave: that was his share of the guilt. We kept him as a slave: that was our share. But, in the case of the

child whom we enslave, the whole abomination is our own. We make him a slave, in the first place: we use him as a slave, in the second. It is a crime to murder a man: it is no less a crime to murder a child. It is a crime to rob a man: it is no less a crime to rob a child. It is a crime to enslave a man: and, is it no crime to enslave a child?

Now, sir, let the house observe the moderation with which we proceed. We say, "Make no more slaves—desist from that iniquity—stop—abstain from an act, in itself as full of guilt, entailing in its consequences as much of misery, as any felony you can mention." We do not say, "Retrace your steps;" but "Stop." We do not say, "Make reparation for the wrong you have done;" but, "Do no more wrong; go no further." Slave-trading and slavery, (for they are but two parts of the same act,) are the greatest crime that any nation ever committed: and when that day comes, which shall disclose all secrets, and unveil all guilt, the broadest and blackest of all will be that, the first part of which is slave-trading, and the last part slavery; and no nation under heaven has ever been so deeply tainted with both the one and the other as we have been. To a nation thus steeped in this species of iniquity, can less be said than this: "We do not ask that you should suffer punishment; we do not ask that you should undergo deep humiliation; we do not ask that you shall make reparation to those you have wronged; we do not even say, Cease to enjoy those acts of criminality which you have begun; but, Take the full benefit and fruition of past and present injustice; complete what you have commenced; screw from your slave all that his bones and his muscles will yield you: only stop there: and, when every slave now living shall have found repose in the grave, then let it be said, that the country is satiated with slavery, and has done with it for ever."

This, after all, is the main point. It secures, a distant indeed, but a certain extinction of slavery. And I give notice to his Majesty's Ministers—I give notice to the gentlemen connected with the West Indies, that if they concede every thing else, but withhold this, we shall not relax in our exertions. The public voice is

with us ; and I, for one, will never fail to call upon the public, loudly to express their opinion, till justice has so far prevailed as to pronounce that every child is entitled to liberty.

Now, for the existing slaves. Slaves they are. Slaves, I fear, they must too generally continue ; but slaves, under a description of servitude considerably mitigated.

I cannot say I deserve any credit for abstaining to liberate them at the present moment. I must confess, that if I conceived it were possible for the slaves to rise abruptly from their state of bondage, to the happier condition of freemen ; if we could clothe them, not only with the rights and privileges, but with the virtuous restraints of social life ; if I did not know that the same system, which has reduced them to the condition of brutes, has brutalized their minds ; if, in fact, I deemed them ripe for deliverance, my moderation, I confess it, would be but small. I should say, “The sooner *you* cease from doing injustice, and *they* from enduring it, the better.” I should take no circuitous course : I should propose no tardy measures of amelioration : I should name no distant day of deliverance : but this night, at once and for ever, I should propose to strike off their chains ; and I should not wait one moment, from a conception that the master has the least shadow of a title to the person of the slave. But, alas, Sir ! the slave is not ripe for liberty. The bitterest reproach that can be uttered against the system of slavery, that it debases the man, that it enfeebles his powers, that it changes his character, that it expels all which is naturally good ; this, its bitterest reproach, must be its protection. We are foiled by the very wickedness of the system. We are obliged to argue in a most vicious circle. We make the man, worthless ; and, because he is worthless, we retain him as a slave. We make him a brute, and then allege his brutality as a valid reason for withholding his rights.

Now, one word as to the right of the master. There are persons, (not in this house, I trust,) whose notions of justice are so confused and confounded by slavery, as to suppose that the planter has something like an honest title to the person of the slave. We have been

so long accustomed to talk of "my slave," and "your slave," and what he will fetch if sold, that we are apt to imagine that he is really yours or mine, and that we have a substantial right to keep or sell him. Then let us just for a moment fathom this right. Here is a certain valuable commodity; and here are two claimants for it—a white man, and a black man. Now, what is the commodity in dispute?—The body of the black man. The white man says, "It is mine:" and the black man says, "It is mine." Now, the question is, if every man had his own, to whom would that black body belong? The claim of the black man to his own body, is just this—Nature gave it him. He holds it by the grant of God. That compound of bone and muscles is his, by the most irreproachable of all titles—a title which admits not, what every other species of title admits—a suspicion of violence, or fraud, or irregularity. Will any man say, he came by his body in an illegal manner? Does any man suspect, that he played the knave, and purloined his limbs? I do not mean to say the negro is not a thief; but he must be a very subtle thief indeed, if he stole even so much as his own little finger.

At least, you will admit this—the negro has a pretty good *primâ facie* claim to his own person. If any man thinks he has a better, the *onus probandi* is on him. Then we come to the claim of the white man. What is the foundation of your right? It shall be the best that can be conceived. You received him from your father. Very good! Your father bought him from a neighbouring planter. Very good! That planter bought him of a trader at the Kingston Slave-market: and that trader bought him of a man-merchant in Africa. So far you are quite safe! How did the man-merchant acquire him? *He stole him*—he kidnapped him! The very root of your claim is robbery, violence, inconceivable wickedness. If any thing on earth was ever proved by evidence, it was proved, before the Slave-trade Committee, that the method of obtaining slaves in Africa was robbery, man-stealing, and murder. Your pure title rests on these sacred foundations! If your slave came direct from Africa, your right to his person is absolutely nothing. But your claim to the child born

in Jamaica is, (if I may use the expression,) less still. The new-born infant has done—can have done—nothing to forfeit his right to freedom. And to talk about rights, justice, equity, and law as connected with slavery, is to talk downright nonsense. If we had no interest in the case, and were only speaking of the conduct of another nation, we should all use the same language; and we should speak of slavery, as we now speak of slave-trading: that is, we should call it rank, naked, flagrant, undisguised injustice.

But when I say, that the planter has no claim against the slave, I do not say, that he has no claim against the British Nation. If slavery be an injustice, it is an injustice which has been licensed by British law. But, whatever may be the claim of the planter against the British Government, he can pretend to none to the person of a child because he happens to be born of negro parents.

I will now take the liberty of reading a short extract of a letter which, on the 11th of last April, I addressed to my honourable friend opposite, in order to put Lord Bathurst, and his Majesty's Government, in full possession of our views and intentions on this subject:—

“The subject divides itself into two: the condition of the existing slaves, and the condition of their children. With regard to the former, I wish the following improvements:—

“1. That the slave should be attached to the island, and, under modifications, to the soil.

“2. That they cease to be chattels in the eye of the law.

“3. That their testimony may be received, *quantum valeat*.

“4. That when any one lays in his claim to the services of a negro, the *onus probandi* should rest on the claimant.

“5. That all obstructions to manumissions should be removed.

“6. That the provisions of the Spanish law, (fixing by competent authority the value of the slave, and allowing him to purchase a day at a time,) should be introduced.

“7. That no Governor, Judge, or Attorney-General should be a slave-owner.

“8. That an effectual provision shall be made for the religious instruction of the slave.

“9. That marriage should be enforced and sanctioned.

“10. That the Sunday should be devoted by the slave to repose and religious instruction; and that other time should be allotted for the cultivation of his provision grounds.

“11. That some (but what I cannot say,) measures should be taken, to restrain the authority of the master, in punishing his untried slave, and that some substitute should be found for the driving system.

“These are the proposed qualifications of the existing slavery. But I am far more anxiously bent upon the extinction of slavery altogether, by rendering all the negro children, born after a certain day, free. For them it will be necessary to provide education. God grant, that his Majesty’s Ministers may be disposed to accomplish these objects, or to permit others to accomplish them.”

For all the blood spilt in African wars fomented by English capital—for civil war which we contrived to render interminable—for all the villages set in flames by the contending parties—for all the horrors and the terrors of these poor creatures, roused from their rest by the yells of the man-hunter whom *we* sent—for civilization excluded—for the gentle arts which embellish life, excluded—for honest and harmless commerce excluded—for christianity, and all that it comprehends, expelled for two centuries from Africa—for the tens and tens of thousands of men murdered in these midnight marauds—for the tens and tens of thousands suffocated in the holds of our slave-ships—for the tens and tens of thousands of emaciated beings, cast ashore in the West Indies; emaciated beings, “refuse men,” (for such was the mercantile phrase,) lingering to a cruel death—for the tens and tens of thousands still more unhappy who, surviving, lived on to perpetual slavery, to the whip of the task-master, to ignorance, to crime, to heathen darkness—for all these, we owe large

and liberal atonement. And I do thank God, we still have it in our power to make some compensation. We have it in our power to sweeten a little the bitterness of captivity—to give the slaves of the West Indies something to render life more endurable—to give them something like justice and protection—to interpose a jury between the negro and the brutality of his master's servant—to declare that the slave shall not be torn from the cottage he has built, from the children he has reared, from the female whom he loves—above all, for that is effectual compensation, we may give him the truths of the christian religion, which, as yet, we have withheld.

For his children, there is a wider range of recompence. We may strip them of every vestige of servitude; and, by taking upon ourselves, for a season, the whole burden of their maintenance, education, and religious instruction, we may raise them into a happy, contented, enlightened, free peasantry. I conclude, as I concluded my letter to Lord Bathurst—God grant, that his Majesty's Ministers may be disposed to accomplish these objects, or to permit others to accomplish them!—I move,

“That the state of slavery is repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution, and of the Christian Religion; and that it ought to be gradually abolished throughout the British Colonies, with as much expedition as may be found consistent with a due regard to the well-being of the parties concerned.”

MR. WILLIAM SMITH.—It is not my intention at this period, and after what has been already said, to go into details; but I feel disposed to contend against some of the most material points adverted to by the honourable gentleman. As to the first settlement of the colonies, it is a long way indeed for the honourable gentleman to look back; and I confess I see no necessity for it, since it makes nothing for his argument. I shall not follow him thither; but when he tells us, that the emancipation of the villeins, and the destruction of feudal tenures, was the work of many ages, I must ask whether gentlemen really do think, that *now*, in the nineteenth century, we are to make no quicker progress

in the annihilation of slavery? and when we know, too, that it is held in detestation by the whole British people? Have we no additional lights to guide us in 1823, beyond those which were possessed in 1400? We know, in point of fact, that at that time the trade in slaves between Bristol and Ireland had scarcely ceased. In the 13th century, it is an unquestionable fact, that Englishmen were kidnapped on the shores of the Bristol Channel, then taken to Ireland, and there actually sold as slaves, until the practice was put an end to by the *Irish* themselves—on account of its acknowledged inhumanity.

But I beg leave upon this, and every occasion when the opportunity offers, to enter my strongest and most indignant protest against the doctrine of treating man as the property of man; and never will I admit that claims of a nature so immoral and extravagant, are to be treated with as much delicacy as private rights of a legitimate description. As long as we suffer ourselves, or any person or persons connected with us, or dependent upon us, to apprehend that it is possible to hold the same unconditional property in their fellow-men as in any other species of production—until this impious opinion, destructive of all the distinctions which the Almighty has established between man and brute, is removed so completely that not a trace of it shall remain, the march of amelioration in the condition of the negroes will be slow indeed.

MR. BROUGHAM.—In Jamaica too, I am told, all is perfect; and that the negro, who must be allowed to be the best judge of his own happiness, is perfectly contented with his lot—so well contented that he would not change it. But, unfortunately for this assertion, it appears, from consulting a single page of the Jamaica gazettes, that it cannot be supported. It is curious enough to observe the broad and most unequivocal contradiction given by these gazettes to this grave statement of the Jamaica Assembly—for it thence appears that many of the negroes have shown a most pointed desire to change their happy situation. In a single page of these gazettes there are no less than fifty “Run-aways”—persons quitting this enviable situation, not

only with a certainty of many privations, but at the risk of all the severe penalties which attach to their crime. But let us look to one of the advertisements: "For sale, 140 head of horned cattle"—I beg pardon of the house; that is not the paragraph I allude to. It is the next column which contains the long list of "Run-aways."—"Cecilia, a young Creole negro woman"—It has been said that young women are never known to be punished in *these realms of negro bliss*, where they are so much better off than in their own country, that they ought to bless their stars that they have been taken from it. Such is the kind of language to which our ears have been accustomed on the subject of negro slavery, from the beginning of this controversy to the present day; but it proves a great deal too much, and consequently proves nothing. But facts must always bear down such arguments; and the very papers I have in my hand, while they describe the persons of the fugitives, distinguishing them by their various marks and brands—the badges of the sufferings and the degradations to which these unhappy beings have been exposed—speak volumes on the subject. But to proceed: "Cecilia, a young Creole woman, five feet high, marked, (branded!) S. M. and W. S. on top, on right shoulder, belonging to the estate of John Stevens." Then here is another, who "says he is free, but has no documents to prove his freedom." Then come several others, described by various maims, and marks on different parts of their bodies. Many have "lost several of their front teeth;" others are described as being marked with letters in a diamond on the shoulders and breasts, and having sores on the arms or legs, and scars on their face or shoulders, with marks of flogging on their backs. And so they go through all the sores, and marks, and brands, and scars, and traces of the cart-whip, which distinguish these happy individuals, who, though we are told they are so contented, are yet, somehow or other, so insensible to their own bliss, that they will run away from their kind-hearted, humane masters, by whom we have been told, too, that the whip is now in nearly total disuse!

I cannot but express my great astonishment that the

right honourable gentleman should have compared the negro slaves in the West Indies with the Roman domestic slaves, and with other slaves of antiquity. And I am the more surprised, when I reflect on the classical taste and profound classical knowledge for which the right honourable gentleman is so remarkable. There are certainly some points in which the condition of the West India slaves resemble those of antiquity; but, speaking generally, the two states do not admit of a comparison. Will any man say, that in a country where the land was tilled by freemen, as among the ancients, it was possible the same habitual cruelty and severity of exaction could prevail, as in those colonies, where men are compelled by the whip, by mere brute force, to cultivate the soil, and where habitual dread of the lash stands engraven on the very front of the system as the sole motive to exertion? Not that I mean to assert that the whip is always used, any more than the whip of a waggoner is always in use; but what I assert is, that the slaves on plantations are worked by placing the men and the women, of various degrees of strength and capacity, in a line, in which they are compelled to toil by the imminent fear of the lash being applied to their backs; and it is applied, as often as their laxity of exertion may seem to render it necessary. Such a system, I say, converts a man, into a brute animal. All the noble feelings and energies of our nature, and almost all traces of humanity, are eradicated by this base practice, by which the man is made to work, and act, and move at the will of another, and is thus of necessity reduced to the level of a brute: it is a practice which makes its appeal, not to the qualities which distinguish him from the beasts of the field, but to those which he shares in common with them.

LORD ALTHORP.—The honourable member for Sandwich has stated broadly, and has quoted various documents to prove it, that the slave is perfectly contented and happy. If we look only to the clothing and food allowed to these unfortunate beings, it is enough to convince any reasonable man, without further investigation, of the necessity of an alteration in the present system; and it is idle to the last degree to talk of the

happiness and comfort enjoyed by them. But it is said, that some of these happy slaves are so conscious of their bliss, that they have even refused to take advantage of an offer of their liberty, and have preferred to live and die in slavery. If the object were to prove the low state to which, as moral creatures, these beings have been reduced, nothing could be stronger than this single statement. Good God ! can it be imagined for a moment, that a man, possessing the least particle of the sympathies and affections of his species, should prefer to doom himself without remorse to slavery for life ; that he should doom his children after him, from generation to generation, to be born to live and die in the bonds of slavery ; that he should doom for ever his sons to the lash of the slave-driver, and expose his daughters to the will and power of a cruel task-master, who might at pleasure subject them to his wanton lust ? If any thing, I say, can raise feelings of indignation and horror in the breast, it would be the knowledge of such a fact as this. But what must be the feelings of a free-born Englishman, enjoying the glorious blessings of freedom, on hearing such a statement as this ? The coldest heart could not but be keenly affected by it ; and even those who are most interested in the question must sympathize with the general feeling of the country.

MR. BUXTON, in reply.—The honourable gentleman is in error, when he says I never alluded to compensation. But what if I had not ? Is there no difference between a vested interest in a house or a tenement, and a vested interest in a human being ? No difference between a right to bricks and mortar, and a right to the flesh of man—a right to torture his body and to degrade his mind at your good will and pleasure ? There is this difference,—the right to the house originates in law, and is reconcileable to justice ; the claim, (for I will not call it a right,) to the man, originated in robbery, and is an outrage upon every principle of justice, and every tenet of religion.

The right honourable gentleman, (Mr. Canning,) complains of my language in having referred to the slave trade. “ Why,” he asks, “ do you recall the horrors

of that odious and abolished practice?" For this plain reason, that your title to a slave is founded on that practice. By the slave trade you obtained him. Upon that practice, now reprobated, and now by us abolished, your claim is founded. Every reproach uttered against slave trading impeaches your title to the slave. You say the man is your property. I ask in reply, how did you obtain that property? And you are driven to the necessity of acknowledging that it was gained by the blackest of crimes—by that act which you now punish as a felony; by that act which the British parliament stigmatized as "contrary to the principles of justice, humanity and sound policy;" by that act which even the assembled Monarchs of Europe, (not suspected of too ardent a love of liberty,) describe as "desolating Africa, degrading Europe, and afflicting humanity," and as "repugnant to the principles of humanity and universal morality."

The honourable member for Taunton has complained most loudly of my having stated that there is no danger to be apprehended in the West Indies. Give me leave to say, the honourable gentleman is as inaccurate in this as in his former assertion; for I stated that I expected nothing else but danger in the West Indies. I said, if I recollect right, that wherever there is slavery there is danger. I told you, that if you wanted to be safe you must be just; that the price you pay for your injustice is your insecurity. I know there is danger. Danger! why? because the few inflict, and the multitude suffer, gross injustice. But I confess it does appear to me to be the most extraordinary of all arguments, to contend that the danger arises not from slavery itself, but from the discussion of slavery in this house. What, then, does the slave require any hint from us that he is a slave, and that slavery is of all conditions the most miserable? Why, sir, he hears this; he sees it; he feels it too, in all around him. He sees his harsh uncompensated labour; he hears the crack of the whip; he feels, he writhes under the lash. Does not this betray the secret? This is no flattery; these are counsellors which feelingly persuade him what he is. He sees the mother of his children stripped naked before

the gang of male negroes, and flogged unmercifully ; he sees his children sent to market to be sold at the best price they will fetch ; he sees in himself, not a man, but a *thing* ; by West Indian law, a *chattel*, an implement of husbandry, a machine to produce sugar, a beast of burden ! And will any man tell me that the negro, with all this staring him in the face, flashing in his eyes, whether he rises in the morning or goes to bed at night, never dreams that there is injustice in such treatment, till he seats himself down to the perusal of an English newspaper, and there, to his astonishment, discovers that there are enthusiasts in England, who from the bottom of their hearts deplore, and, even more than they deplore, abhor all Negro Slavery ? There are such enthusiasts ; I am one of them ; and while we breathe we will never abandon the cause, till that *thing*, that *chattel*, is reinstated in all the privileges of man.

The Original Resolution having been withdrawn, the question was put by the Speaker upon the following amendment, proposed by G. Canning, Esq. one of his Majesty's Ministers, and carried UNANIMOUSLY.

" 1st, That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the condition of the slave population in his Majesty's colonies.

" 2d, That through a determined and persevering, but judicious and temperate, enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population, such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of his Majesty's subjects.

" 3d, That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose, at the earliest period that may be compatible with the well-being of the slaves, the safety of the colonies, and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of all parties concerned therein.

" 4th, That these Resolutions be laid before his Majesty."